



Steering Committee

John Madigan, Chair
Crown Ridge Tiger Sanctuary

Emily McCormack, Vice Chair
Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge

Meredith Whitney, M.S.,
Secretary/Treasurer
*International Fund for
Animal Welfare*

Bobbi Brink
Lions, Tigers and Bears

Catherine Doyle, M.S.
*Performing Animal
Welfare Society*

Jonathan Kraft
Keepers of the Wild

Kathryn Bertok
Carolina Tiger Rescue

Kristin Leppert
*Global Federation of
Animal Sanctuaries*

Letrecia "Trish" Nichols
Black Pine Animal Sanctuary

Noelle Almrud
*Cleveland Amory
Black Beauty Ranch*

Tammy Thies
The Wildcat Sanctuary

Staff

Kathy Blachowski
Program Manager

The Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance (BCSA) is a non-profit organization that works to end the private ownership and commercial exploitation of big cats and other wild cats, while providing expert resources to its sanctuary members aimed at improving the health and welfare of rescued captive wild cats.

March 12, 2022

Rep. Christine Cohen and Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, Co-Chairs
Environment Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 3200
Hartford, CT 06106

Testimony re: Support for HB 5293 – An act prohibiting the use of wild or exotic animals in traveling animal acts

Dear Co-Chairs Cohen and Gresko, and Members of the Environment Committee:

The Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance (BCSA), comprised of reputable sanctuary operators and highly regarded national and international partner organizations, strongly supports HB 5293 to prohibit the use of wild or exotic animals in traveling animal acts.

The BCSA's 16 sanctuary members care for more than 540 wild cats, as well as other captive wildlife, including animals who were once exploited for "entertainment." As the people who provide lifelong care for rescued big cats, we know how challenging it is – even under the best conditions – to care for these animals and provide them with the most stimulating and fulfilled life possible. Each animal is an individual with a specific history and complex needs. But the one thing they have in common is that they thrive in the peace and quiet of a sanctuary setting, where they know respect instead of exploitation, have the opportunity to engage in natural behaviors, and their needs are far better met.

The big cats you see in traveling shows are non-domesticated animals; they are biologically the same as their wild relations. As such, they are under constant stress, including during travel, loading and unloading, and when made to perform in front of loud, noisy crowds. Despite being far-ranging animals in the wild, big cats in traveling acts spend the majority of the day confined in small cages, where they eat, sleep, and relieve themselves. The amount of time spent performing or in training is estimated to be 1-9% of the day, with the remaining time spent in small enclosures or cramped transport cages. During training sessions, handlers use harmful methods to control big cats. They may whip, strike, or use an electric shock device to force an animal to perform.

The presence of abnormal repetitive behaviors in big cats – such as pacing back and forth – is an indicator of psychological stress. The fact that these behaviors are so universal in traveling shows clearly demonstrates that stress is rife in this industry. Chronic stress is widely known to have adverse effects on animal health and welfare.

Sanctuaries work very hard to create conditions that offer environmental complexity and mental and physical stimulation for their big cats, in order to maintain health and good welfare. By their nature, traveling shows cannot create similar conditions nor can they even begin to meet the multi-faceted needs of big cats. Close confinement, constant travel, and unnatural conditions prevent the animals from engaging in natural behaviors and being able to simply relax.

BCSA sanctuary members know how dangerous big cats are and take great precautions to protect their staff, the public, and the animals. Our members do not come into direct contact with the big cats they care for. Traveling shows, by their very nature, are transient, with dangerous animals being moved all the time and held in temporary caging. It is no surprise that animals have escaped and harmed and killed trainers as well as members of the public.

Animal acts send a dangerous message to the public that big cats are safe to interact with. This can potentially cost people and animals their lives. In recent incidents, people tried to enter big cat enclosures at the Franklin Park Zoo in Massachusetts and the Bronx Zoo in New York. In Florida, a man nearly lost his arm after reaching into a zoo enclosure to pet a tiger; the endangered Malayan tiger was shot and killed.

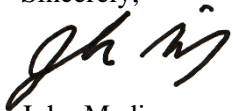
The BCSA also opposes the use of big cats in traveling shows because these acts support the rampant breeding of big cats in the U.S., usually by breeders who have no regard for animal health or genetic integrity. As a result, captive big cats often suffer lifelong health problems. This is especially evident in white tigers. Selective breeding to produce this color variation necessitates inbreeding, which is strongly associated with genetic defects and debilitating health issues. Several BCSA sanctuary members care for rescued white tigers and other cats with genetic defects due to inbreeding. Many of these animals require specialized long-term care at great expense to the sanctuaries.

Wild animal acts do not educate the public or help conservation efforts. There is no educational value in displaying big cats who have been denied all that is natural to them and are forced through coercion to perform tricks. Scientific research suggests that seeing wild animals in an entertainment context hinders real conservation efforts.

The public is concerned about the treatment of captive wildlife in traveling shows. More than 750 venues across the country have banned wild animal performances. Six states and more than 159 municipalities have passed legislation addressing this issue. It's time for Connecticut to join this humane movement.

The BCSA urges you to support HB 5293 to protect the animals and the public. We are available to answer any questions or provide additional information.

Sincerely,



John Madigan
Steering Committee Chair
Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance

BCSA Sanctuary Members

Big Cat Rescue
Black Pine Animal Sanctuary
Carolina Tiger Rescue
Cedarhill Animal Sanctuary
Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch
Crown Ridge Tiger Sanctuary
Elmira's Wildlife Sanctuary
Forest Animal Rescue

Keepers of the Wild
Lions, Tigers and Bears
Performing Animal Welfare Society
PrideRock Wildlife Refuge
Safe Haven Wildlife Sanctuary
The Wildcat Sanctuary
Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge
WildCat Ridge Sanctuary

BCSA Partner Members

AAP Primadomus
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Bears, Etc.
Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries
International Fund for Animal Welfare
The Humane Society of the United States
Tigers in America
World Animal Protection